

Women of Burundi: A Study of Social Values

pick up a piece of firewood and chase the hyena. However, if she hears thieves or a lion or antelope or wild pigs in the fields, she gives the cry of alarm so that the neighbours will come to help her. One need not think that the Rundi consider a woman courageous who is at home alone night after night with several babies and who chases away wild animals and thieves.¹⁵

In a Tutsi household, all of the tasks of the Hutu household must be done and in addition those which result from the fact that the houses and the yard are used as corral and barns. If a Tutsikazi is lucky, her husband is wealthy enough to provide her with Hutu to do the farming and with one or more Hutu or Tutsi girls to help her in the house and yard. If this is the case, the Tutsikazi's job is to command and supervise others. However, even a Tutsukazi of a very good patrilineage will very likely have to work at least a little in the fields and do some cooking and other household chores. Whether it is the wife, a daughter, or a servant girl, somebody has to clean the yard after the cows have been taken to pasture. The cow dung has to be collected and taken to the fields where it is needed as fertilizer. Fresh earth has to be spread over the puddles and mud that the cows have left, and it is necessary to look in on the calves that are kept in the various houses of the dwelling unit. If a calf or a child or a Hutu is sick, the mistress of the house must prepare the medicine. The wife of a herder has as her first obligation the proper care of the milk which her husband or the boy who milks the cow gives into her care in the morning and the evening. She lets it accumulate so that she can churn every few days. Then, she must clean the butter and put aside some to be used for cooking, some to be mixed with red ochre to be used as a cosmetic, some to anoint the mats of the bed when her husband is at home. If the family is not rich enough to pay a herd boy and if the sons are still young, the Tutsi husband and wife take turns watching over the cows at night. At dawn, both may sleep: thieves will not come once it is daylight.

The richer one is, the more serfs and servants there are to do the work in the house and the fields and to attend to the cattle. Among the very wealthy, the wife is primarily the administrator of her husband's property. She supervises the workers, she gives them orders, she punishes those who misbehave and those who are lazy, and she receives visitors, who are frequently men of high position. The proper education of a Tutsikazi of good family is the responsibility either of her mother or of the princess in whose household she is brought up. There is hope that a daughter will be married by a wealthy man, that she will be literally a *mwamikazi* who will not have to do menial work.

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Many children represent happiness for both men and women in Burundi. Women adore babies, and a pregnant Rundikazi is a happy woman. Only very rarely do women go into the bush to look for the medicines that cause miscarriage. (For unwed mothers, the motivation is obviously different). It is not possible to find a Rundikazi, even a great-grandmother, who will admit that she is *umukechuru*, a woman beyond the age of child-bearing. A woman who is sterile, or who has had only one child and never again conceived believes that she has been cursed by her paternal-aunt or is the victim of witchcraft. Some women produce Gargantuas, children they have carried for 11 months, or 15 months or even two years. The Rundi are by no means ignorant of the biological cause and signs of pregnancy.¹⁶ They simply refuse to acknowledge any other alternative conditions than pregnancy or nursing mother. It is also not for a lack of knowledge of the biological facts that men have no interest in the biological paternity of their children. If a brother or cousin is the biological father, this is no more than is to be expected. If it is a stranger who has got his wife with child, he has made the husband a free gift. The father does not reproach his wife if she has conceived during one of his long absences from home, nor is he at all prejudiced against those of his children who have been fathered by other men, when the time comes to choose his heritor.¹⁷

Among the princes and the Tutsi of the very good patrilineages, the mother does not take care of the children except to nurse them. A governess, a woman from a family only slightly lower in the social scale than that of the child, looks after it. At present, the wealthy send their school-age children to European schools far from home. In the past, young adolescents were sent to be brought up by princes and princesses. Among the commoners, an infant is with its mother day and night. He is carried nude on her naked back and nursed at the first whimper. The mother plays with her baby, especially with her son, tickles it everywhere, and talks baby talk to it. She adores her baby, but the moment she finds herself pregnant again, she immediately weans her child. The child, who is probably between 18 and 24 months old, is abruptly separated from his mother. He is handed over to a brother, a sister, a grandmother, to anyone who will have him. Sometimes, the grandmother or a grown-up sister will permit a newly-weaned child to suck at the dry breast, but soon the child is put on the ground to crawl about, to play, and to learn that life is hard. It is not surprising that the mortality rate of newly-weaned children is very high.

If there has been a divorce, the departing wife takes with her